

Foreign Drum Company Report: Part 1

by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.

SONOR

Over 100 years of drum manufacturing has brought German-made Sonor drums to the international eye. Many European drummers talk up Sonor, and Sonor is starting to become widely used here in the States.

Sonor's shells are 9-ply beechwood and are thick and heavy! The shells are constructed from the outside using a special "oil-heating" press. The finished product has staggered ply seams that contribute to the strength of the shell. Sonor also features genuine rosewood shells, and transparent acrylic shells which are 1/4" thick. Seamless snare shells are built from ferro-manganese steel, and have a center bead. The snare strainer is the side-throw type and snare wires can be tensioned at both sides of the shell. Snare drums are available in 5 3/4" and 6 1/2" depths. The usual sizes of bass drums, tom-toms and concert toms are available. Instead of the standard type tension rods, Sonor's rods are slotted screws and can only be turned with their special screwdriver key. Many hard rock drummers have the problem of tension rods loosening up to the point of almost falling out when doing rim shots. Sonor has counteracted this by supplying counter-lock nuts which fit inside the lug, and lock the rod in place. Unfortunately, the nuts can only be fitted to Sonor's metric-sized rods.

Tom-tom holders are of the ratchet type with the mount arm passing through the drum. A single post enters the bass drum plate on both single and double holders, (also available is a tri-mount). The steel mounting plate on the toms utilizes a wedge-shaped locking device with the set screw entering at an angle to lock the drum in position. Sonor uses a prism-clamp for the base pipe of their holders, and for floor tom leg and bass drum spur locking. All stands, spurs, and legs have built-in spur tips to dig into set-up surfaces. Double and single-tension hi-hat stands are available, as well as four different single, spring/strap bass drum pedals. All pedal foot-

boards are forged steel instead of die-cast. The most professional of all the pedals seems to be the *Daniel Humair* model. This pedal is multi-adjustable from the height of the beater to the length of the action and throw. Three different beaters are provided: a double post wood/felt, single post wood and felt beaters. Hard, soft and medium springs are also supplied. However, like all Sonor drums and accessories, the *Humair* pedal is expensive.

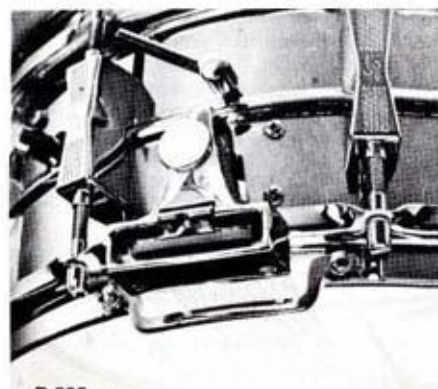
Cymbal stands have double-braced legs and ratchet tilters. One Sonor specialty is a double cymbal stand, a single stand base with two cymbal arms coming off the upper tube.

For high-class muffling of bass drums, Sonor has a special mechanical, twin felt muffler which fits into the bass drum. A knob on top of the drum is turned to pull or loosen the felt strips for different bass drum timbres.

Besides the beechwood and rosewood finishes, there are smoky transparent, metallic and glossy finishes.

Sonor was previously distributed here by Hohner, but is now available in the United States and Canada through Alden in Westwood, Massachusetts. Prices are very high (a 5-pc. kit with hardware lists from \$1700 — \$2000), but drummers who can handle the price will get some really well-crafted drums and hardware. For literature and prices, write: Sonor Drums, c/o Charles Alden Music Co., Inc., Southwest Industrial Park, Westwood, MA 02090.

There was a time when American drummers looked down their noses at percussion equipment manufactured anywhere outside U.S. shores. Well, times have certainly changed. MD's close-up focuses on several innovative, design conscious firms in England, Italy, Germany and Japan and shows why many have become serious contenders in the competitive drum business. We think you'll be amazed. This issue, MD puts Tama, Sonor, Yamaha and Hipercussion under the microscope. Look for Part 2, an update on Premier, Pearl, Arbiter and Staccato in July's issue.



TAMA

Japan has been the manufacturer of many U.S. imports for a long while. Their newest drum manufacturer, Tama, has been making a few heads turn here in the States.

Tama makes three types of drum kit shells: mahogany, rock maple, and fiberglass, respectively named *Imperialstar*, *Superstar*, and *Fibrestar*. The regular sizes of bass drums, tom-toms, concert toms, and snare drums are manufactured. Snare drums are available in metal, wood, and fiberglass shells with parallel, center-throw, or side-throw strainers. The snare wires themselves are regular "snappy



snare" which extend the length of the drum. However, for use with the parallel strainer, snare wires made from aircraft control cable are available.

As far as hardware goes, Tama's is particularly sturdy. The tom-tom holders are the center-post, "L" arm type like Ludwig's. The bass drum spurs and floor tom legs have rubber/steel spike spurs similar to Sonor's tips. Four lines of cymbal stands are manufactured; most with double-braced legs, and all have nylon bushing clamps at the height adjustments. The *Spartan* line of stands has convertible tips from rubber feet to a steel spike. Tama's top-of-the-line bass drum pedal and hi-hat both have extra-wide die-cast footboards. The hi-hat stand utilizes a center-pull system with a steel strap and an external tension adjustment rod. The bass drum pedal has a hinged heel and uses a compression spring in a sealed housing.

Tama's innovative ideas are definitely worth mentioning. The most outrageous of all are the *Octobans*, a set of eight, 6" diameter fiberglass tubes cut at different lengths like pipes on a pipe organ. When tensioned equally, the drums will sound in a diatonic scale. Perhaps the best way to describe their sound is a cross between bongos and a cowbell, with a somewhat "watery" tone.

Billy Cobham had Hinger *Touch-Tone* cut some bass drums, fit a timpani head on one side, mounted them on orchestral bass drum stands, and named them "gong drums." Since Tama's acquisition of Cobham's endorsement, they are now manufacturing gong drums. The head on a gong drum is 2" larger than the shell diameter, making the drum yield a very deep, clear B-O-N-G. As well as stand-mounted bass drums, gong drums are also available as rack toms and floor toms with the head 1" larger than the shell.

Tama also makes a rollaway stand for toms, cymbals, microphones, and gong bass drums. When changing sets, a good part of the drum kit can just roll away at once into the corner. For single-headed bass drums, a shell supporter is made to prevent distortion of the shell.

So many companies are making "add-on clamps", that Tama had to get in on it, too. The *Multi-Clamp* allows drummers mounting of extra cymbals and tom-toms on his stands and tom holders. Special microphone adaptors are also available.

Tama's finishes are typically Japanese. A great deal of them are shiny, metallic solid colors, but they do offer black gloss, mahogany, and blond maple finishes. Tama drums are distributed in the United States by the Elger Company, the same people who deal Japanese-made Ibanez guitars. For information and prices, write: Tama Drums, c/o Elger Co., Box 469, Cornwells Heights, PA 19020.

YAMAHA

Yamaha is a name that's not new to the American consumer. The company has a wealth of design, manufacturing and marketing experience and is into everything from motorcycles to pianos. No surprise that the company would sooner or later make its debut in the drum market.

Yamaha calls their offering *System Drums*: a two series line which can be used separately, as complete sets, or integrated. The 9000 series has all birch laminated shells; the 7000 offers a heavier sound with deep, mellow response from shells of selected woods. Other features of this line include non-slip clamps, an air-seal lamination process for shell strength, wide-

stance spurs and springless lugs for elimination of vibrations.

Without a doubt, Yamaha has done some research and development homework in the hardware department. Foot pedals are die-cast and frames have adjustable spurs to prevent slipping. The pedals also include ball bearing action and adjustment capability for shaft height, spring tension, timing belt length and beater angle and height. Cymbal stands, available in straight or boom styles, are capable of being set up at any angle. Height is maintained through the use of non-slip clamps, and the boom rod can be placed in a vertical position for extended height.

Snare stands feature a carbon fiber ball-joint, as do tom-tom holders for single adjustment operation. The holders also offer independent adjustment for accurate positioning of three or four drum combinations.

Hi-hat stands have die-cast pedals, adjustable spring tension and an optional stand extender for increased height.

The Yamaha company has sunk a great deal of time, talent and money into the development of its drum line and a full scale marketing campaign keeps the name in the limelight. Another foreign manufacturer worth watching. For further information contact: Yamaha International Corp., PO Box 6600, Buena Park, CA 90622.



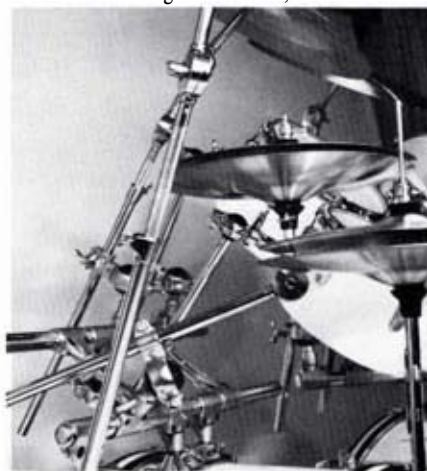
HIPERCUSSION

From Milano, Italy comes perhaps the most advanced drum company in the world, HiPercussion (pronounced hip-percussion). It seems that these people have taken the best of all American manufacturers, and, along with a few of their own innovations, have come up with a very versatile drum kit.

The most amazing thing about HiPercussion is their mounting system, a true "rack mount" system. A long pipe extends the bass drum with two centered stems that fit into the bass drum mount plate. Movable clamps are fitted to the pipe. Tom-tom arms and cymbal arms are fitted into the clamps. All toms and cymbals mount on this one main pipe. Pearl has a similar idea, fitting a lot of drums on one bass drum. I imagine HiPercussion's bass drum shell has amazing strength to be able to take the weight of toms, cymbals, mount arms, clamps, and the rack pipe. And pipes may also be stacked for mounting even more drums and cymbals on a bass drum. This is the ultimate in multi-drum set-ups. HiPercussion also offers mike clamps with goosenecks that also fit onto the pipe (like Tama's stand mike clamps). No more wasting space on stand bases.



The tom-tom arms themselves are very similar to the old-style Slingerland double ball joint arms. The snare stand is the regular basket-style with a flat base tripod, or it can be mounted on the bass drum spurs. On a regular kit, this would be considered impossible; but instead of little leg-type spurs, some of HiPercussion's bass drums have huge roller trolleys with staggered wheel positions. The trolley pipe accepts the snare stand pipe, saving more floor space. Besides the regular floor and bass drum-attached hi-hat stands, a boom hi-hat is available. If you play two bass drums, a foot isn't free to play a closed hi-hat, so the boom hi-hat mounts on the rack pipe. The cymbals cannot be open and closed like a regular hi-hat, but the clutch



can set the cymbals shut tight or half-open for closed hi-hat rhythms when already busy with double bass drums.

HiPercussion has a full range of double-headed and single-headed toms like most companies. They also make tom-toms in 7" and 11" diameters, as well as 14" and 16" tuneable floor toms with a foot pedal for timpani-like effects. The tuneable toms are available in wood or transparent acrylic. Snare drums are available in wood with a laminate, wood with a covering, or a coppered metal shell. The snare strainer is the easy stick-shift type like the Ludwig *Classic*. Besides the rack-mounting cymbal stands, HiPercussion also has a boom floor stand with the longest boom arm I've ever seen. Their bass drum pedals are cosmetically and mechanically simple — a single-spring, strap system.

HiPercussion offers six complete outfits; the smallest being the *Jazz 44/5* with an 18" bass drum with spurs, 12" and 13" toms, 14" pedal floor tom, snare drum, and hardware. The largest kit is the *110/11* containing two, 22" bass drums with trolleys, 16" pedal floor tom, 18" floor concert tom; 10" 11", 12", 13", 14", 15" concert toms (all rack mounted), four cymbal rack mounts, a cymbal boom stand, double hi-hats, snare drum, and hardware. An accessories case is also included with all outfits.

HiPercussion says that their drums are for the drummer who "lives in the future of high-class percussion." Art Blakey, Mickey Roker, and Ron Selico have all played HiPercussion kits at one time or another. As of yet, HiPercussion is not distributed in the United States but hopefully someone will pick them up here soon. For literature and export prices, write: Caldironi Musica, HiPercussion Division, Via Perugino, 44, 20093 Cologno Monzese/Milano, Italy.

